



**Remarks at One-Year Celebration of  
Welcome Table New Orleans**

By Mayor Mitch Landrieu

June 24, 2015

*As prepared for delivery*

It is so good to be here today.

I am truly inspired by what is being done by the people of New Orleans through the Welcome Table for racial reconciliation. Over the last year, you have sought to do the hard work chipping away at the walls that divide us.

Indeed, in many cases we only live a few blocks away from each other, but are often a world apart.

To start with, we literally need to come together. We must meet each other, eat together, talk and share, build trust, help heal old wounds and then together move toward a better future.

Of course, the events over the last days, weeks and months show the great need for this work.

After all, it is not just New Orleans.

Our nation is a place of complex contradictions. Diversity is our greatest strength, but all of us living today inherited this country's difficult history on race.

Last week on Juneteenth, we celebrated 150 years since the destruction of slavery and it has been 50 years since that fateful march in Selma. And, there is now an African American President.

But still, the big message we should hear from the streets of Baltimore and Ferguson is that we are a long, long way from being that promised 'one nation', 'indivisible with liberty and justice for all.'

Instead of being indivisible, we are too often divided; too often divided by race, too often divided by class. And, a house divided against itself cannot stand.

As long as these fissures endure, so do the tragedies that are the inevitable byproduct.

And, it doesn't matter whether the bullets fly from the gun of a young white boy in the sanctuary of Mother Emmanuel in Charleston shooting at the heart and soul of America;

Or, whether the bullets come from a gun being held by a young African American man aiming at another young African American man on the streets;

Or, if the target is a police officer on the beat, ambushed by an assassin or shot in the back by a criminal.

I pray for New Orleans Police Officer Darryl Holloway who was shot and killed last weekend. The pain and hurt is searing. Our hearts are broken. He joins 110 other New Orleans Police Officers who since the 1850s paid the ultimate sacrifice to keep us safe. They are gone, but not forgotten.

Please join me in a moment of silence.

<MOMENT OF SILENCE>

Make no mistake: although these violent events from Charleston to New Orleans and beyond are separated by time, place and victim, they are not isolated instances. They are fruits of the same poisonous tree of hatred, isolation and disassociation that permeates our nation.

As Dr. King said, we are all bound together in "an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."

And it is in this context we can see the deeper meaning to Galatians 6:7- *Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

So, I ask – pray, what have we sown?

That is the hard question, and we should look with eyes wide open at where we were, where we are, and where we want to go.

And when you do that, anyone can see that the current situation in America is perfectly captured by a federal report from the *National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*.

This blue ribbon commission created by the President reports that "our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white– separate and unequal."

It also finds that the violence is "foreshadowed by an accumulation of unresolved grievances and by wide-spread dissatisfaction."

The commission's recommendations are straight-forward and basic:

- Better housing for black men and women outside of impoverished areas;
- More investment in public education;
- New major public works projects that include job training;
- And, a stronger safety net.

These recommendations resonate. It is our reality. But this report was not written about today's situation.

It was written in 1967, 48 years ago, by a group better known as the Kerner Commission, which was created by President Lyndon Johnson in response to the rioting in Detroit, Los Angeles, Chicago and Newark.

Now, five decades later, America has changed in a million ways. But sometimes it seems that the more things change the more they stay the same.

In fact, sometimes it feels as though big problems like inequality and violence are today even more difficult to resolve.

It is obvious that we have so much more work to do, and I believe that the only way we can start moving forward is if we acknowledge our nation's original sin and try to make amends. That is step one.

So on this day, let me as a government leader acknowledge and apologize for the country's history and legacy of slavery.

But we need to go further than a much-needed apology; this is about action and dealing with the still enduring, engrained legacy of slavery at every level of our society.

Especially as we approach 2018 and our 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a city, one part of that broad effort is examining historic symbols throughout our city, symbols like the Robert E. Lee statue in Lee Circle.

There may have been a time when that monument reflected where we were as a city, but times change and as we prepare for 2018, we should look at all the symbols in the city to see if they still have relevance to our future.

We are committed to the principle that we can only move forward if we move forward together - one team, one fight, one voice, one city.

After all, it is all connected and we can't address our problems on a piecemeal basis or on a limited basis. Everything must be part of the larger whole.

That is why we started our comprehensive murder reduction strategy NOLA FOR LIFE, which connects to reform at the jail, which connects to our economic opportunity strategy, which connects to our work with NORDC and the schools.

But, we want to get to the root of the problem, and Lord knows our problems go deep.

Indeed, when you think about the unrest in Ferguson and Baltimore, Trayvon Martin and now the horrible shooting in Charleston, or when you think back to what happened in Jena, Louis., there is a common thread that runs through all these things - race.

We can't go around it, over it or under it, we need to go through it. But to work through this most difficult issue, we must be able to hear each other, see each other, understand each other and feel each other. And, once we start to listen rather than speak, see rather than look away, we will realize a simple truth. We are all the same. We all want the same things: peace, prosperity and economic opportunity...and for our kids to have a better life than us.

But still, there are some who are cynical and believe we cannot change, that our divisions are somehow part of the natural order of things.

In New Orleans, we are proving them wrong. As Americans, there is nothing we can't do, but only if we make the commitment and stay united as one.

Indeed, we started the New Orleans Welcome Table as an example to show the whole world what is possible and how we can bring together all the people in this city- black and white, rich and poor, faith leaders, business, nonprofits, government.

Then, once we get everyone moving in the same direction the possibilities are limitless, whether that means dealing with issues of affordability, improving our schools or making our city safe.

We can do it all and the rest of the nation will take note.

But no one said it was going to be easy.

So when we get frustrated and start to wonder if anything we are doing here is making much of a difference, we should remember the true words spoken by a great American, Robert Kennedy.

He said:

Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

*"If Athens shall appear great to you," said Pericles, "consider then that her glories were purchased by valiant men, and by men who learned their duty." That is the source of all greatness in all societies, and it is the key to progress in our time.*

This is the story of humanity.

Indeed, each generation comes to this point.

Each generation makes a choice.

Each generation for a moment grips that arc of history and bends it, one way or another, forward or back.

But here is the thing: it doesn't bend on its own.

It is you, the people of New Orleans who have to do the bending.

Thank you and God bless.